

# D. C. Attorney Played Vital Role in Havana

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A young Washington lawyer today described how he parleyed with Fidel Castro on the day the Bay of Pigs prisoners were released before issuing the order for unloading of the ransom ship in Havana.

E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr., 37, son of retired Court of Appeals Judge E. Barrett Prettyman, is a member of the law firm of Hogan and Hartson. He came into the prisoner-release negotiations two weeks ago and was a key man in Havana for James B. Donovan and the Cuban Families Committee.

In an exclusive interview with The Star, Mr. Prettyman disclosed the reason for his unexpected flight from Havana to Homestead Air Force Base, Fla., with the fifth planeload of prisoners on Christmas Eve. Mr. Prettyman said his mission was to obtain permission from United States authorities for the families of the freed prisoners to leave Cuba on the ransom ship SS African Pilot. (The African Pilot was scheduled to depart Havana today for Port Everglades, Fla., with 1,000 women and children, relatives of the released prisoners. No adult males were permitted to leave Red Cuba.)

Mr. Prettyman said this happy task was a total surprise to him. His primary purpose for going to Havana was to help explain what sup-

plies were on board the ship and the complicated transportation problem that had necessitated the loading of some supplies in which the Cubans had expressed no interest.

"The ship was not to be unloaded until the word came from me," said Mr. Prettyman. "About 5 p.m. on Sunday, we were satisfied that Castro was keeping his word and Cuban stevedores began unloading the ship."

It was just about that time that Premier Castro allowed the first of four planes to depart with full loads of prisoners. The airlift was completed next day.

Mr. Prettyman gave this account of his role in the tense, last-minute arrangements for the exchange of the 1,113 Cuban rebels for an estimated \$53 million in American medical supplies and foods:

"With other members of the Red Cross and Cuban Families Committee, I flew to Cuba early Saturday (Dec. 22) on a plane carrying some of the supplies and we landed at San Antonio de los Baños military airfield about 6:30 a.m. Until nearly noon, I worked in a little office at the air base with a Cuban girl using a duplicating machine to make extra copies of the invoices and going over the invoices with Dr. Leonard Scheele.

"Then I heard shouting outside and I saw Fidel standing near one of our planes. There was a crowd around him and he was talking with Dr. Scheele (Leonard Scheele, former United States Surgeon General). I walked over to them and Dr. Scheele introduced me to Fidel. His handshake was firm and his manner was formal.

## Wait for Ship

"There was no bantering. We talked through an interpreter, a Maj. Rene Vallejo. The major and Mr. Castro wore military uniforms like our Army fatigues, with visor caps and side-arms."

At this stage, Mr. Prettyman said, the conversation was solely about the operation. He said Fidel wanted to know how many planes had arrived, what was being unloaded from them, and when the ship would be in port.

"I said, 'It's pretty good,' Mr. Prettyman said. 'Castro told me the African Pilot wouldn't be in until

5 p.m. and he proved right. He also said he knew who I was, although I had not figured publicly in the matter up 'til then."

Some of the prisoners already had arrived from the Isle of Pines about 10:30 a.m. on three transport planes with Cuban insignia, Mr. Prettyman said. The plane, however, taxied to the other side of the field and the men were placed in some kind of a compound, Mr. Prettyman declared.

"I told Castro he could appreciate that there had to be good faith gestures on both sides," Mr. Prettyman recalled. "We wanted the prisoners released before the ship was unloaded."

said the ship wasn't to be unloaded until word came from me and the ship was 40 miles away.

"Fidel said he would get me a car right away. I said it was not just a matter of my being there, and repeated that some of the prisoners should be released. He said it would be ordered to happen at 5 o'clock."

Mr. Prettyman said he and Dr. Scheele made it clear to the Premier how complicated and difficult a task it had been to assemble and transport the vast quantities of supplies in just two weeks time.

At about 12:30, he said, Mr. Donovan and Washington attorney John Nolan arrived at the air base. The discussion continued until Mr. Donovan said he wanted to talk to Castro in private. Mr. Prettyman said he bearded Cuban leader and the Brooklyn lawyer went off to one side with the interpreter.

## Delay Causes Fear

"When the private confab was over, Fidel asked if we'd had lunch," Mr. Prettyman related. "We ate in a Cuban officers club and then were driven to the dock by two Cuban Army privates in an old Oldsmobile. It was nearly 4 p.m. when we got to the African Pilot because the drivers were not sure where it was."

"I went aboard and talked to Capt. Alfred Boerum and then I went to a phone to do some more checking. It was nearly 5 o'clock when Fidel arrived at the dock. He came in the first car of a four-car motorcade. He rode in front with the river, the next two cars were side by side and the fourth car came along behind."

The men in the other cars, Mr. Prettyman said, were military personnel. When Fidel travels, the car lights are lowered, but no siren sounds. The motorcades slow down for stop-signs, the lawyer said.

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"I introduced Castro to the captain," he said. "and we talked about how long it would take to unload. Fidel said it would be completed in 24 hours. The captain emphasized the importance of doing it carefully because much of the material was fragile.

## Gives Green Light

"At that point, we were satisfied that the bargain would be kept and authorized them to start unloading. The first planeload of prisoners left at about the same time."

It was about this time, Mr. Prettyman said, that he received about the rarest invitation an American can get these days—an offer to take a tour of Havana with Fidel Castro.

"I was standing on the deck with Maj. Vallejo while Fidel posed for some pictures with American Red Cross personnel and I idly asked where Ernest Hemingway's house was," Mr. Prettyman said. "He pointed to a spot on the skyline and asked if I'd like to see it. I said I expected Mr. Donovan to come by and that I'd better wait.

"Maj. Vallejo left for a minute and then came back and said Fidel wanted to take me himself. You just don't say 'No' to something like that. Fidel had the captain, Dr. Scheele and the Associated Press pool reporter in his car and I got into the second one with five military men.

"It took us half an hour to drive through Havana to the Hemingway home. The gate of the fence was closed. We stood on the steps of the one-story house and talked while they sent for Hemingway's caretaker to let us in.

"Everything is as he left it. The house stands on a hill and from one window you can see the sea. The caretaker showed us every room and every knick-knack. We saw the board Hemingway kept under his bed for his sore back and the table in his bedroom where he wrote. The fireplace is chest high and there was an old typewriter there.

**Questioned on Author**

"All of us, even Castro, asked questions about Hemingway. The caretaker obviously had adored Hemingway and told us all about his routine. Fidel became much more relaxed in the author's home and began speaking in English for the first time.

"Castro talked about Hemingway's habits and said he had known him in earlier times but had not seen him toward the end of his stay in Cuba. He seemed to admire the man more than his writings.

"We looked at Hemingway's mementoes—an ivory figurine of an elephant, a piece of a meteorite, his paintings, a Karsh photo of the author and a hilarious cartoon, apparently

referring to "The Old Man and the Sea." It showed Hemingway snarling with a line in the water attached to the carcass of a fish.

"I examined his books and he had them in every room but the kitchen. I was struck by the oddness of the collection. They ranged over subjects from star-gazing to submarines. They all seemed well worn. In the kitchen, there was a TV set and the caretaker said Hemingway used to come in to make bets with his servants on the fights."

"Castro seemed tired when we were in the kitchen and he sat on a stool while we all leaned against the icebox and against the walls to continue the conversation. I asked Fidel if he had an opinion about Hemingway's death. He said he thought Hemingway had been a very sick man.

"The caretaker said Hemingway had called about five days before his death and said he was not well. The man said Hemingway told him he'd always have a job.

"Fidel said Mrs. Hemingway had asked permission to take away some of her husband's pictures and books after his death. He said he had permitted her to do it. I suggested to Castro that he might invite her to come to Havana. He said they had a 'good relationship' with Mrs. Hemingway."

**Not Smoking**

Mr. Prettyman said he noticed that Castro did not smoke during all the time they were together and it seemed to bother him when someone else did. Castro has been known as a heavy smoker of cigars.

"At about 7:30 p.m., we left to tour Havana and we drove to a huge 10-story housing project surrounding a park area. Crowds of people greeted us and many of them were kids," Mr. Prettyman said.

"Castro told us people were chosen for the apartments on the basis of the size of their families. One family in the crowd had six children, another had 10.

"Castro said the rent was fixed at 10 per cent of a family's income but he didn't say whether it was by the week or by the month. Fidel asked one man what he paid and the man said 16.40 pesos."

(The peso is figured to be worth about eight cents now but actually is unacceptable in world markets. Therefore, it has value only in Cuba.)

Then the motorcade went back to the ship. A huge truck loaded with Gerber's baby food passed and Fidel appeared to be cheerful. Mr. Prettyman said. The Cuban leader repeated his prediction that the ship would be unloaded in less than 24 hours and said he would declare a 24-hour truce with the United States, Mr. Prettyman recalled.

"The captain said he'd set his watch to be sure he was gone when the truce ended and Fidel laughed genially," Mr. Prettyman said. "I thanked him and he said it had been a good trip as we shook hands. After dinner I went to bed in the Havana Libre Hotel which is sumptuous and obviously a show-place. They gave Dr. Scheele and myself a suite of rooms.

**Excitement at Airfield**

"Next day (December 24) I was up at 7 and called for a car to take us out to the air field. When we got there, we found great excitement and confusion. Word had come that Fidel had agreed to let the families of the prisoners go to the United States.

"My mission was to obtain permission from United States authorities and many others connected with the project and send word back to Cuba how many could go. I left on the second plane with a contingent of prisoners."

(This was the Clipper Bald Eagle which touched down at Homestead at 10:25 a.m. with 109 prisoners. Reporters saw Mr. Prettyman hasten down the stairway and drive away in a waiting car but did not at that time know who he was. Later, he told a press conference he had been asked to join in making transportation arrangements by Mr. Nolan.)

"I told our people about the relatives. We had to clear it with the shipping line, Immigration, Customs and many others."

Mr. Prettyman left Florida in time to rejoin his family Christmas Eve night. He believes his connection with the Cuban prisoners' exchange is over now.

"It has been," he said with great restraint, "a busy two weeks."



MR. PRETTYMAN

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